



# **Macedonia's Ethnic Albanians: Bridging the Gulf**

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## Table of Contents

<b>MAP OF MACEDONIA .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS.....</b>	<b>2</b>
A. Demographics .....	4
B. Census .....	6
C. Constitutional and Legal Position of Minorities .....	7
1. Macedonian Constitution .....	7
2. Macedonian Citizenship Law .....	9
D. Ethnic Albanian Political Scene .....	11
1. Political Parties .....	13
2. Albanian Language Media .....	17
3. Public Sector Employment.....	17
4. Albanian Language Education.....	18
E. Federalisation or Decentralisation .....	20
<b>III. HOW DEVELOPMENTS IN KOSOVO AFFECT MACEDONIA .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>23</b>

### APPENDICES

- A. Ethnic Albanian Political Parties**
- B. About the International Crisis Group**
- C. ICG Reports and Briefing Papers**
- D. ICG Board Members**



# **MACEDONIA'S ETHNIC ALBANIANS: BRIDGING THE GULF**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Ten years after independence, Macedonia's two largest ethnic groups continue to lead very separate and distinct lives. The uneasy co-existence between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians has only just withstood the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the continuing instability in Kosovo. Valid concerns about Macedonia's security are too often being used to justify postponing hard decisions about internal problems. Political leaders on both sides of the ethnic divide, while negotiating privately for piecemeal improvements, publicly cater to the more extreme nationalists in their respective parties, and positions are hardening. There is a continued reluctance to squarely confront the compromises that would legally safeguard Macedonia's multi-ethnic composition: if that reluctance is not soon overcome, Macedonia and the region face renewed instability.

Compared with the rest of the region (Montenegro apart) Macedonia<sup>1</sup> has been something of a multi-ethnic success story. The country has thus far managed to maintain a relatively high degree of stability. Gloomy scenarios about the country's disintegration and a possible division amongst its neighbours have not materialised. But its citizens' increasingly contradictory views of inter-ethnic relations are worrying. Ask ethnic Albanians about the state of current relations and they are likely to reply that relations have never been better. Ask ethnic Macedonians and they are likely to respond that relations have never been worse. This gulf between these two peoples is what shapes the country's uneasy coexistence. Albanians are by far the largest national minority in Macedonia, and their status within the state and their attitude towards it have a direct bearing upon Macedonia's long-term stability and viability.

Relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians have long been problematic. During the 1980s, Macedonia's then-communist authorities supported Serbia's crackdown on ethnic Albanians. Macedonian independence in 1991 brought many positive gains to the ethnic Albanians and other minorities but the overall record of inter-ethnic relations is still mixed. Ethnic Albanians and other minorities complain that they are discriminated against daily. Ethnic Macedonians express understandable fears about their country being divided and reduced in the context of the emergence of a Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo.

Macedonia itself can do little to influence the outcome of events in Kosovo and must rely upon international guarantees for security. The Kosovo crisis exposed many of the

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term Macedonia in this report is purely a convenient terminology. It recognises that historically "Macedonia" is a geographical expression - not the name of a state. It does not pre-judge any opinion on the use of "FYROM" or "Republic of Macedonia" as the correct name of the state.

fundamental divisions between the country's ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians. Again, the two cultures could not have been further apart in their views of the conflict. Almost all ethnic Albanians in Macedonia believe that the conflict in Kosovo was necessary and worthwhile as it brought about the "liberation" of Kosovo from Belgrade's control. Ethnic Macedonians, however, worry that growing demands for the independence of Kosovo will encourage similar territorial aspirations among Albanians in Macedonia. They view ethnic Albanians as a minority entitled to certain guaranteed rights like any other minority in the country but not at the expense of diminishing their country's Slavic character.

What exactly ethnic Albanians in Macedonia want is one of the most sensitive questions in the southern Balkans. There is a window of opportunity that remains open for the European Union to help shape the ethnic Albanian agenda and the ethnic Macedonian response by encouraging both communities to work through their differences within a context of integration with European security, political and economic institutions. Now is the time for reaching a final status agreement: the window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely.

## **Recommendations**

### **Political**

1. Any resolution of Kosovo's final status should be made contingent upon provisions for ensuring Macedonia's territorial integrity and the Kosovo Albanians' explicit acknowledgement that they make no effort to include Macedonia's Albanians in a broader ethnic Albanian national state.
2. The European Union (EU) should take the lead role for the international community in drawing Macedonia into both European and transatlantic political, security and economic institutions.
3. The EU should appoint a high-level EU integration advisor for Macedonia to encourage and facilitate the political and economic changes that are needed, both to facilitate ethnic integration and Macedonian stability and to lay the groundwork for European integration.
4. The EU should encourage Macedonia's governing coalition partners to begin serious negotiations for a political settlement between the ethnic Macedonians and the country's minority inhabitants, which would include if necessary an amendment to the constitution to meet ethnic Albanian and other minority concerns.
5. The EU should take all available opportunities to remind politicians in the ethnic Albanian and Macedonian communities of the dangers of extreme rhetoric in the current regional setting and urge that such rhetoric be tamped down.

6. The OSCE should take a leading role in encouraging electoral reform that makes elected officials accountable to the entire electorate and not exclusively to their own communities.
7. The OSCE should begin to focus on the political ramifications of the upcoming census due to be conducted in April 2001 and work directly with the ethnic Albanian political leadership to avoid repeating the disputed outcomes of the 1991 and 1994 censuses. This should include recruitment and training of ethnic Albanian staff for the Macedonian Statistical Office in order to dispel charges that the census methodology and tabulation were manipulated.
8. Local governments should be given the flexibility to raise local revenue in order to provide critical public services at the community level. Continued technical assistance in this area by USAID and the EU Phare should be based on demonstrated progress following local elections. The current number of municipal units should be reduced from 124 to around 80.

### **Security**

9. NATO should seek agreement with Skopje to maintain a NATO troop presence along Macedonia's borders with Kosovo and Serbia for an indefinite period.

### **Economic Assistance**

10. The European Commission should take the leading role in organising and co-ordinating, with support from the United States and international financial institutions, a multi-year international economic assistance package that targets reforms focused on advancing the ethnic integration agenda for Macedonia.
11. The European Union should take all available opportunities to encourage significant private investment in Macedonia.

### **Education**

12. International donors should make funding of higher education contingent upon progress by the Macedonian government in finding an effective long-term solution to providing access to, and funding of, higher education for all the country's minorities. Early establishment of an Albanian language university and transparent decision-making procedures should be a key focus of this initiative.

### **Media**

13. Western governments, international organisations and NGOs should provide financial assistance to private media outlets in order to offer staff salaries that are competitive with salaries offered to translators by the international community.



# **MACEDONIA'S ETHNIC ALBANIANS: BRIDGING THE GULF**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

What exactly ethnic Albanians in Macedonia want is one of the most sensitive questions in the southern Balkans. Albanians are by far the largest national minority in Macedonia. They constitute between one-fourth and one-third of Macedonia's overall population of two million, and their status within the state and their attitude towards it have a direct bearing upon Macedonia's long-term stability and viability.

Despite predictions to the contrary, Macedonia has so far managed to maintain a relatively high degree of stability. Gloomy scenarios about the country's disintegration and a possible division amongst its neighbours have not materialised. In comparison to all its neighbours except Montenegro, Macedonia can be considered so far something of a success story when it comes to inter-ethnic relations. Nevertheless, while inter-ethnic relations on the whole have remained stable, considerable problems remain, which could easily ignite the simmering tensions between ethnic Albanians and their Slav neighbours.

The Kosovo crisis exposed many of the fundamental divisions between the ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians inside Macedonia. The two cultures could not have been further apart in their views of the conflict. Almost all ethnic Albanians in Macedonia believe that the conflict in Kosovo was necessary and worthwhile as it brought about the "liberation" of Kosovo from Belgrade's control. Ethnic Macedonians, however, worry that growing demands for the independence of Kosovo will encourage similar territorial aspirations among Albanians in Macedonia. Ethnic Macedonians view Albanians as a minority entitled to certain guaranteed rights like any other minority in the country but not at the expense of diminishing their country's Slavic character.

The ethnic Macedonian majority and the ethnic Albanian community have yet to define their relations in a way that would satisfy both sides and lead to long-term mutual accommodation. Instead, both communities view each other with deep suspicion, and neither is willing to compromise on what it regards as vital issues. There is much evidence to support ethnic Albanian claims of past injustices and recriminations are quickly cast. But ethnic Macedonians express understandable fears about their country being divided and reduced in the context of the emergence of a Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo.

The current governing coalition of the hard right nationalist party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the formerly radical ethnic Albanian party, the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), has an unprecedented opportunity to forge an historical compromise between the two largest ethnic groups in the country. It is imperative for the stability of Macedonia, and the Balkans as a whole, that a *modus vivendi* which satisfies both ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians is found quickly.

Ethnic Albanians must put all their demands on the table as a prerequisite for greater integration and access to state resources. The ethnic Macedonians, in turn, must be willing to accept the multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious reality of their country. They may have to amend the constitution and agree to reduce the official status of the Orthodox Church. All must be willing to accept that in the Balkans, the willing misuse of political symbols can be as dangerous as a challenge to national territorial borders.

This ICG report examines the issues that threaten the uneasy coexistence between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians. It provides background information on the country's demographic situation, the constitutional and legal position of ethnic minorities and the political developments which have determined relations between ethnic Albanians and the state since the country's independence in 1991, and reviews progress in the two years since ICG's 1998 report.<sup>2</sup> Finally, it identifies the major political issues shaping inter-ethnic relations and assesses what changes can realistically be made to improve coexistence between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians.

## **II. INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS**

The crisis in Kosovo has led to diverging opinions about the state of relations between the two groups. Some international observers believe that since the end of the war, inter-ethnic relations have never been worse with the level of mistrust and animosity having become more deeply entrenched. Yet others point to the endurance of the unlikely ruling coalition and the overwhelming ethnic Albanian support for the VMRO-DPMNE presidential candidate Boris Trajkovski. VMRO-DPMNE clearly relied upon the votes of the ethnic Albanian community to secure Trajkovski's victory and their coalition partner, the DPA, delivered the needed votes. DPA leader Arben Xhaferi said at a news conference that "the elections demonstrated that the Albanians constitute a political factor which should not be sidelined."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ICG Balkans Report N° 38, *The Albanian Question in Macedonia: Implications of the Kosovo Conflict for Inter-Ethnic Relations in Macedonia*, 11 August 1998.

<sup>3</sup> *Albanian Daily News* 1230, 22 January 2000.

Are relations deteriorating or improving? On the surface, the formerly radical DPA party has pulled itself closer to the centre and is working through government structures to gain advances for its constituents. The party has won some important symbolic victories: it secured the release of two party members serving prison sentences for civil disobedience; ethnic Albanians are more visible and better placed in central government; more hours of Albanian language programming are broadcast on public television and radio; and the issue of Albanian language higher education is heading towards resolution.

Still, there are many external flashpoints that intensify domestic tensions between the two ethnic groups. On 5 June 2000 two Macedonian border-patrol soldiers were wounded by incoming sniper fire from the Kosovo side of the border near the village of Dolno Blace. President Boris Trajkovski held meetings with Western ambassadors and Kosovo Protection Force (KFOR) representatives. In response, KFOR significantly increased foot patrols and helicopter surveillance and activated a Turkish brigade. Trajkovski, in his capacity as commander-in-chief, raised the combat readiness of border troops and said that Macedonia will return fire with fire in the future. He stated that the border incidents stem from criminal gangs from Kosovo conducting illegal activities and not from an organised attempt to destabilise the country.

In early June 2000, rumours emerged of a secret report that detailed the existence of paramilitary forces known as the "Albanian National Army" (AKSH). Government spokesman Antonio Miloshevski denied the existence of such a report in a 7 June press conference. That same day, however, A1-TV reported that it had received a signed copy of the secret report that was issued by Colonel Nikola Kostovski, Chief of Military Security, on 10 May 2000. Colonel Kostovski then denied the existence of the report.

Pavle Trajanov, leader of the Democratic Alliance party and former Minister of the Interior, claimed that in his former capacity he had information on the activities of extremist groups in Macedonia and their connections to the military and political leadership in the country. He stated emphatically that information existed on the exact formation of command structures, weapons and all Macedonian participants in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDMS) Parliamentarian Ljupco Popovski also stated that there was worrying evidence of weapons stockpiles throughout the country and increased terrorist activities. He also suggested that DPA supporters had entered all military and security structures and could be providing access to information and findings to the paramilitary forces.

DPA leaders Arben Xhaferi and Menduh Thaci accuse the opposition of fabricating the story in order to break the coalition and to discredit ethnic Albanians in the armed forces. Xhaferi issued a statement saying that "articles in some media are nothing but first-class stupidity aimed at demonising DPA and to create a bad presentation of the Albanians in general. The Macedonian media would present



the Albanians as an element of instability in the Balkans . . . and their other goal is to discover the naiveté of Prime Minister Georgievski and his decision to cooperate with the Albanian factor.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, in everyday life the two communities lead increasingly separate and segregated lives. Having very few points of contact and sporadic social interaction, ethnic Albanians and Macedonian Slavs have little understanding of each other's language, culture or history. This has reinforced mistrust and intolerance between the two peoples and encouraged ethnic Albanians to develop separate and parallel systems, particularly in higher education, in opposition to existing state structures.

## **A. Demographics**

Ethnic Albanians are by far the largest national minority in Macedonia. Their actual population, however, is strongly disputed. The issue of population is important because it affects all political discussions and most disagreements between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. It affects debates over the number of minority language schools, the number of hours of minority language television and radio programming, employment in the state sector, the use of national symbols and many other daily issues.

Ethnic Macedonians point to the censuses conducted in 1991 and 1994, according to which ethnic Albanians account for between one fifth and one quarter of the country's population. According to the 1991 census — the last one to be conducted while Macedonia was still part of Yugoslavia — 427,313 ethnic Albanians lived in Macedonia. This figure equals 21.0 per cent of a total population of 2,033,964. According to the same census, Macedonians make up 64.6 per cent of the total population; the third-largest group, the Turks, account for a mere 4.8 per cent; Roma make up 2.7 per cent of the population;<sup>5</sup> Serbs 2.2 per cent, Muslims 1.7 per cent, Vlachs 0.4 per cent, and all others combined 2.6 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

A second census, funded and monitored by the international community under the auspices of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)<sup>7</sup> was conducted in 1994. According to this census, 22.9 per cent of the population is ethnic Albanian. The ethnic Albanian community says that these censuses do not accurately reflect their number, which they claim is considerably higher. One of the main problems was that the 1994 census only counted individuals who had Macedonian citizenship at the time. Since a restrictive citizenship law was

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<sup>4</sup> *Flaka*, 7 June 2000, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> There is general consensus that the real number of Roma is definitely higher. Many of them stated their nationality as Albanian or Turkish in order to escape discrimination.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the "others" are "Yugoslavs" and people who did not identify as belonging to any ethnic group, while the remainder includes small numbers of Greeks, Bulgarians and Montenegrins.

<sup>7</sup> The Precursor to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

adopted in 1992, more than 100,000 ethnic Albanians were left out of the statistics.

The real number of ethnic Albanians currently living in Macedonia is almost certainly higher than the data of either census suggest. Two factors strongly support this conclusion. Firstly, the birth rate among ethnic Albanians is considerably higher than among ethnic Macedonians. Secondly, over the past years quite a number of Albanians from Kosovo and other parts of federal Yugoslavia have moved to Macedonia to escape persecution. While claims that ethnic Albanians make up some 40 per cent of Macedonia's population are almost certainly exaggerated, a figure in the high twenties or even around or just above 30 per cent seems quite realistic, especially if all residents and not just citizens are taken into account. An important factor to be considered is the high emigration level of young Macedonian Slavs.

Most ethnic Albanians live either in the capital Skopje, which has the biggest single concentration of Albanians, or in a rather compact area in the north-west and west of Macedonia, i.e. the regions bordering Albania and Kosovo. In Skopje, there are more than 100,000 ethnic Albanians according to official data, but although this is the biggest number of ethnic Albanians in any single city in absolute figures, they officially account for less than one fifth of the capital's population.<sup>8</sup>

In the area around Tetovo and Gostivar, ethnic Albanians are the clear majority. In three of the newly formed municipalities in this area, known as Pollog, 99.6 per cent of the population is Albanian. In some municipalities of Kicevo and Debar<sup>9</sup>, ethnic Albanians have become the majority. Further to the southwest, many Albanians inhabit the border region down to Struga on Lake Ohrid, where they form the majority of the population. In the municipalities of Negotino-Polosko and Velesta, near Struga, the population is 99.8 per cent ethnic Albanian.

East of the Tetovo-Gostivar region, many Albanians live in Skopje and the surrounding area, and also in and around the town of Kumanovo. The area is very diverse in ethnic terms; it has a sizeable Serb community and ethnic Albanians constitute over one third of the total population. There are six more municipalities with an ethnic Albanian share of over 97 per cent, mostly in the west, but also in the chain of villages linking Skopje with Kumanovo in the north.

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<sup>8</sup> According to the 1991 census, 99,225 ethnic Albanians lived in the five Skopje municipalities (which then comprised both the capital city and its surroundings). Other data put the number of ethnic Albanians living in the city of Skopje at 107,000 (Human Rights Watch, "A Threat to 'Stability.' Human Rights Violations in Macedonia." New York, Washington, London, Brussels: Human Rights Watch, 1996, p. 27.).

<sup>9</sup> At the time of the 1991 census, Macedonia was divided into 34 municipalities. Since the 1996 administrative reform, there are 123 municipalities in the country, plus the city of Skopje, which forms a special unit (as a kind of umbrella above those municipalities within the city limits). Ethnic Albanians opposed the 1996 reforms and the electoral manipulation involved. For example, in Skopje it takes about 30,000 votes to elect an MP in an Albanian area, whereas in Stip it takes 5,000 or less to elect a Macedonian-speaking MP.

In other parts of Macedonia, the number of ethnic Albanians is much lower, and in some municipalities there are hardly any. In eighteen of the old municipalities, ethnic Albanians accounted for less than 1 per cent of the population, which in many cases means less than 100 people. Most of those municipalities are located in the central and in particular the eastern parts of Macedonia.

Such a geographic division of the ethnic Albanian minority has of course certain implications for the ethnic Albanian community and by extension for Macedonia as a whole. A compact area of settlement means stronger interaction among the ethnic Albanian community, daily life determined by one's own traditions and culture (at least where ethnic Albanians are a solid majority), and also a sense of separateness from the rest of the population in everyday life. At the same time, other ethnic groups living in solidly ethnic Albanians areas often feel like outsiders. Ethnic Macedonians in particular often claim to be "foreigners in their own country" in areas dominated by ethnic Albanians because of extensive use of the Albanian language.

## **B. Census**

The next census is scheduled from 1-15 April 2001. Given the acute sensitivity of what percentage of the population is comprised of ethnic Albanians it is imperative that the census methodology and results be universally accepted. The ethnic Albanian party leadership has been silent on the issue to date. Much of the DPA and other ethnic Albanian political parties' power is derived from the uncertainty of just how large the ethnic Albanian population is. Many ethnic Macedonians privately charge that the ethnic Albanian political leaders neither want to participate in the census nor endorse its validity because it will refute their claims that 40 per cent of the country's population is ethnic Albanian. If the percentage of ethnic Albanians legally residing in Macedonia proves to be significantly less than is claimed, many of the demands for equal status with the ethnic Macedonian majority will go unheeded.

The European Union is providing technical assistance and training funds in anticipation of the upcoming census. Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Commission located in Luxembourg, is conducting the training for the staff of the Macedonian Statistical Office. The other components of the assistance are in the areas of standardisation and harmonisation of the statistical data and their collection. There are twenty pilot circles (designated sections of various municipalities) where a trial census is underway. Samplings are being taken in two sections of Skopje, in the centre and in Karposh municipalities, which are multi-ethnic. In some areas, the data is collected electronically (census-takers have laptops with new software) and in other areas it is collected manually on forms.

The pilot census is being conducted only in the Macedonian language because the Statistical Office stated it was too costly for them to prepare materials in all languages for the pilot census only. This data is being processed, and based on this analysis, the collection methodology will be refined for the forthcoming national census.

There are no ethnic Albanians employed at a senior level in the Statistical Office of Macedonia. Nor were ethnic Albanians among the census staff sent for training at the Eurostat offices in Luxembourg. This is more than an unfortunate oversight because it will do little to prevent the ethnic Albanians from repeating the same charges used to dispute the 1994 census: the census was not properly prepared, the forms were not offered in the Albanian language and no ethnic Albanians were present when the data was processed.

## **C. Constitutional and Legal Position of Minorities**

### **1. Macedonian Constitution**

The Macedonian Constitution was adopted soon after the 1991 referendum on Macedonian independence from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ). The ethnic Albanians boycotted the referendum and refused to accept the constitution unless it recognised the Albanians as a constituent people who were equal in status to the ethnic Macedonians.

In particular, the ethnic Albanians and other minorities rejected, and continue to reject, the preamble of the current constitution which defines Macedonia as a "national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens and permanent coexistence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma, and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia." The country's minorities believe that this statement implies ethnic Macedonians have a higher constitutional status, and places minorities at the margins of society.

Ethnic Albanians say that the wording of the preamble is putting them in a worse position than they were before in the former Yugoslavia. Although ethnic Albanians were not one of the "constituent nations" under the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, the fact that they numbered more than two million people gave them some weight, and the autonomous province of Kosovo was effectively run by ethnic Albanians from 1974 until 1989 when President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia stripped Kosovo of its autonomy.

While the constitution appears to grant generous minority rights, it also declares Macedonian as the sole official language and grants special recognition to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. While freedom of religion is guaranteed and there is no official state church, there is some uneasiness about the fact that only the Macedonian Orthodox Church is mentioned specifically in the constitution. Article

19 states that "the Macedonian Orthodox Church and other religious communities and groups are free to establish schools and other social and charitable institutions, by ways of a procedure regulated by law."

Article 9 states that all citizens are "equal in their freedoms and rights, regardless of sex, race, colour of skin, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property and social status" and that they are "equal before the constitution and law."

Article 48 guarantees the right to primary and secondary education but makes no reference to higher education:

Members of nationalities have a right freely to express, foster and develop their identity and national attributes.

The Republic guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of the nationalities.

Members of the nationalities have the right to establish institutions for culture and art, as well as scholarly and other associations for the expression, fostering and development of their identity.

Members of the nationalities have the right to instruction in their language in primary and secondary education, as determined by law. In schools where education is carried out in the language of a nationality, the Macedonian language is also studied.

Article 7 of the constitution states that the "Macedonian language, written using the Cyrillic alphabet, is the official language in the Republic of Macedonia." But a provision in the same article allows the use of minority languages alongside the Macedonian language in municipalities where those nationalities are either the majority of constituents or make up a "considerable number of inhabitants." Ethnic Albanians demand that their language be made a second official language, with equal status to Macedonian. This would include the use of Albanian in public administration, the courts, and in all levels of education, and also in the parliament.

At the beginning of the government mandate there was speculation in the newspapers that some of these demands would be satisfied, due to a large purchase of simultaneous translation equipment. Many believed that it would be installed in parliament, but the equipment seems since to have disappeared. President of the Parliament Savo Klimovski suggested in late December 1998 that new rules for parliamentary procedures should include a provision allowing all members of parliament from national minorities to use their mother tongue. The Social Democrats and other opposition parties have resisted this proposal to regulate the working language(s) of the parliament but it has never been adopted by vote.

A two-thirds majority in the parliament is required to change the constitution or even adopt operating procedures (house rules) for the parliament. For years now, the parliament's work has been based on a set of provisional rules (basically amendments to the procedures adopted in the 1980s during the former Yugoslavia), which prevent it from functioning more efficiently. But with various political parties having different and often mutually exclusive ideas of how those rules should be changed, reaching an agreement and securing the necessary majority seems extremely difficult.

The current government coalition of VMRO–DPMNE, the Democratic Alternative (DA), and DPA holds 72 of the 120 seats in the current parliament. Even if all coalition deputies were to vote in favour of constitutional amendments or new house rules, another eight votes would be necessary to adopt them. The other ethnic Albanian party, the Party for Democratic Prosperity, has fourteen seats and could hardly afford to vote against changes benefiting Macedonia's ethnic Albanian community.

But in a secret vote, it is likely that some of the 47 VMRO–DPMNE deputies — namely those belonging to the more nationalist wing — would not vote to adopt such proposals. It also seems clear at the moment that neither the Social Democrats nor the Liberal Democrats would support such changes. Their candidates in the presidential elections campaigned on platforms that rejected further rights for ethnic Albanians.

At the government level there is a *sotto voce* consensus among the coalition partners that the constitution cannot be changed at present. The DPA leadership knows it would be near impossible to win such a vote and is not looking for any public defeats so near to the local elections scheduled in September. The coalition appears to have agreed that the issue of higher education in the Albanian language can be resolved within the framework of the existing constitution.

## **2. Macedonian Citizenship Law**

In the field of inter-ethnic relations, one of the most contentious pieces of legislation is Macedonia's citizenship law, which was passed in 1992.<sup>10</sup> According to this law, Macedonian citizenship can be acquired by (ethnic) origin, birth on Macedonian territory, naturalisation, or by international agreements.

Persons born in Macedonia can obtain citizenship if at least one parent is a Macedonian citizen. Persons born abroad qualify for Macedonian citizenship if both parents are Macedonian citizens. The key requirements for acquiring citizenship by naturalisation are that a person must be eighteen years old; have

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<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the citizenship law see: Human Rights Watch, "A Threat to 'Stability'," pp. 65–73.

been resident in Macedonia continuously for at least fifteen years; have a home and a permanent source of funds; have the ability to speak the Macedonian language; agree not to endanger Macedonia's security and defence; and renounce foreign citizenship.

The law does not take into account that Macedonia was part of the former Yugoslavia until 1991 and that many long-time residents do not qualify for citizenship because they are not ethnic Macedonians and were born in other parts of Yugoslavia. Article 11 of the citizenship law stipulates that "Macedonians by origin" living outside the country qualify for immediate citizenship. This means the law guarantees immediate citizenship to persons of ethnic Macedonian background regardless of their place of residence while at the same time imposing stringent requirements on members of other ethnic groups.

Clearly, the citizenship law must be amended in order to guarantee equal treatment for all people living in Macedonia who were former citizens of Yugoslavia. This could be done by amending the law in such a way that persons officially resident in Macedonia since 1991 or earlier qualify for citizenship if they were born in the former Yugoslavia while Macedonia was still part of it. At the moment there are no specific initiatives to change the constitution or the "Citizenship Law", despite the pledges of the new government at the beginning of its mandate.

Ethnic Albanians in Macedonia by their sheer numbers are more affected by the provisions of this law than other ethnic minorities. Numbers aside, ethnic Albanians were also one of the more mobile ethnic groups within the former Yugoslavia. Significant numbers of ethnic Albanians from Macedonia went to Kosovo to live and study. At the same time, many went to other Yugoslav republics in search of employment. Ethnic Albanian "guest workers" were quite a common occurrence in Croatia and Slovenia, for example. This mobility within the former Yugoslavia inevitably leads to problems when Macedonia's current citizenship law is applied.

Obviously, the influx of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo throughout the 1990s has complicated things even further. Changes in the citizenship law which would make it possible for 100,000 or more ethnic Albanians to acquire citizenship will be difficult to sell to ethnic Macedonian parties who fear that such changes would upset the country's delicate ethnic balance. Early campaign sloganeering indicates that the discriminatory "Citizenship Law" may resurface as a political issue in the September local elections. Many long-term residents in predominately ethnic Albanian communities are left off the voter lists because of the disputed status of their citizenship. Again, this unresolved problem when viewed through the ethnic Albanian prism is seen as a blatant attempt to minimise ethnic Albanian electoral power, particularly since many Slavs are still on the electoral register despite the fact that they have lived in Australia, Canada or the United States for decades.

## **D. Ethnic Albanian Political Scene**

The ethnic Albanian political framework in Macedonia developed independently of the ethnic Macedonian one, having suffered political marginalization and practical impotence during the long years under Titoism. Most of the larger ethnic Macedonian parties with the exception of the VMRO–DPMNE, have some connection to the previously ruling League of Communists of Macedonia (SKM). The first two ethnic Albanian parties were formed in 1990: the People's Democratic Party (NDP) and the "relatively" more moderate Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP).<sup>11</sup> The PDP soon proved to be the bigger of the two parties, primarily because all its leaders were nomenclatura functionaries who were vigorously promoted by President Kiro Gligorov. The PDP joined the government, and its ability as a ruling party to dispense patronage undoubtedly helped establish its dominance during the first half of the 1990s.

In November 1992, however, ethnic relations within Macedonia deteriorated sharply following the killing of four Albanians by Macedonian police during a peaceful demonstration. Many within the PDP were not satisfied with party leader Abdurrahman Aliti, whom they accused of being too soft towards the Macedonian parties in the government and of not doing enough to promote the rights of ethnic Albanians. In fact he was widely regarded as a collaborator with the Skopje regime. As a result, the more radical wing of the PDP under the charismatic leader Arben Xhaferi and Menduh Thaci won a vote to take control of the PDP, but were expelled from the party in 1994. They then formed the Party for Democratic Prosperity of Albanians (PDPA).<sup>12</sup>

As inter-ethnic relations continued to deteriorate throughout the 1990s, a growing number of ethnic Albanians switched their support from Aliti to Xhaferi, whom they considered to be less willing to make concessions and likely to do more to satisfy ethnic Albanian demands. In the 1996 municipal elections, the PDPA did quite well and won a number of mayoral positions, including Tetovo and Gostivar, the two main centres of ethnic Albanian population in Macedonia. In 1997, the PDPA and the small NDP merged into the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA).<sup>13</sup> The new party positioned itself on the more radical wing of ethnic Albanian politics in Macedonia.

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout this paper, the acronyms for Albanian and Macedonian political parties are those under which the parties are registered. Thus, the Party for Democratic Prosperity is referred to as PDP, although in the Albanian language its acronym is PPD.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed account of the development of ethnic Albanian political developments in Macedonia during the 1990s, see *The New Macedonian Question*, ed. James Pettifer, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1999, Chapter 10.

<sup>13</sup> The legal registration of the new party was rejected in court because it does not meet constitutional requirements such as its logo, and not listing the party name in Cyrillic. The party continues to be referred to as PDPA-NDP in conservative Macedonian-language newspapers.



Despite their many differences, the PDP and the DPA formed an electoral alliance before the 1998 parliamentary elections in order to maximise the impact of the ethnic Albanian vote. They put up joint candidates throughout the country and also had a common proportional list on the national level. The two parties together won 19.6 per cent of the national vote and managed to elect 25 candidates to the parliament. Of those, fourteen belonged to the PDP and eleven to the DPA.

Following the 1998 parliamentary elections, the DPA entered a coalition with the VMRO–DPMNE and the Democratic Alternative (DA). This came as a surprise to many since the DPA and the VMRO–DPMNE were perceived as being the most radical proponents of nationalism on either side of the ethnic divide. VMRO–DPMNE leader Ljubco Georgievski recognized that it would be extremely difficult to govern the country without an ethnic Albanian coalition partner and many within VMRO-DPMNE believe the choice was made to appease the international community.

The balance between the two ethnic Albanian parties shifted completely when DPA joined the government and the PDP went into opposition. DPA has filled certain posts in the state administration and in public enterprises with its supporters, while the old guard in the PDP is out in the cold. Xhaferi also managed to engineer several structural changes, such as getting many police chiefs sacked. How the roles have been reversed is best illustrated by the fact that the presidential candidate of the DPA, Deputy Health Minister Muharem Nexhipi, received 14.9 per cent of the vote in the first round of the presidential elections on 31 October 1999, while the PDP's Muhamed Halili garnered only a meagre 4.4 per cent.

Although ethnic Albanians have always been represented in the Macedonian government, they have only held token appointments, usually as assistant ministers, often without staff, equipment or even an office. DPA has been much more successful in placing ethnic Albanians in key government ministries such as Justice, Labour and Social Policy and Local Self-Government. New gains have also been made at the deputy ministry level: interior, defence, transportation and communications, education and health. The current government consists of fourteen ministries divided among the three coalition partners: seven for VMRO-DPMNE, four for DA, and three for DPA.<sup>14</sup> New ambassadors have not been appointed yet due to a prolonged battle on how to distribute them among the coalition partners. President Trajkovski is also putting pressure on the government to be given the chance to "strongly suggest" candidates for some posts. The DPA has demanded that it be allowed to place ambassadors in Ankara, Berlin, Budapest, Cairo, Copenhagen, Ljubljana and Paris.

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<sup>14</sup> The parliament passed legislation on 21 July 2000 to reduce the number of ministries from 24 to the current fourteen.

In the run-up to the 1999 presidential elections, the DPA repeatedly aired variations of a proposal to create the position of vice-president. One of their ideas was to create a vice-presidency which would by default go to an ethnic Albanian candidate. The other one was to create this position and rotate the posts of state president and vice-president among ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians at every presidential election. Apart from the fact that this idea would not receive sufficient support outside the ethnic Albanian camp to muster the required two-thirds majority in the parliament, it also poses certain constitutional problems. Most significantly, it would prevent members of other ethnic groups from running for either of those posts, which directly contravenes several articles of the current constitution. Determining beforehand which nationality should be held by the candidates for the presidency and the vice-presidency would either mean that pre-electoral alliances across the ethnic divide would be inevitable or that only one ethnic group could nominate its candidates for one of the positions. The first idea would be rejected by political parties who fear that voters would turn to other parties; the second proposal would pose constitutional problems.

Ultimately, it seems that the DPA's proposal of introducing the position of vice-president will not lead anywhere. Both legal and political considerations suggest that this initiative is doomed to failure. The proposal was put forward just before and during the recent presidential election campaign, which suggests that it was either just part of the DPA's campaign strategy or that it might be used as a bargaining chip in order to secure other concessions from the DPA's coalition partners.

## **1. Political Parties**

Since its poor showing in the 1999 presidential elections, internal strife within the PDP threatens to paralyse the party. Abdurrahman Aliti reluctantly relinquished the party's chairmanship and other leading members also handed in their resignations amid continuous allegations of corruption among its top politicians. In an effort to purge its tainted leadership, the party went back to its revolutionary roots to find its new leaders. The party rank and file banished all of the old guard from leadership positions. In fact, none of the elected PDP members of parliament are included in the new party structure.

The new leader of PDP is Dr Imer Imeri, who was once accused of being a member of an ethnic Albanian paramilitary group by the SDSM-led government in 1993. At that time, Imeri and several prominent ethnic Albanians were arrested for planning to overthrow the Macedonian government and proclaim an independent Albanian state called "Illyrida." The police claimed to have found large caches of arms and ammunition in their office premises. Ethnic Albanians, however, claimed that authorities in Belgrade fabricated the whole story. In the end, the alleged conspiracy could never be proved and the accused were released from prison.

Since 1993, Imeri has continued his medical practice and kept a low profile within the PDP structure. His two key deputies, Qemal Musliu from Skopje and Shpetim Pollozhani are not well known on a national level. The new secretary general Mahi Nesimi is a journalist who was the PDP party spokesman from 1991-92 but later withdrew from the party leadership. He currently works as a journalist at Macedonian Television Radio (MTV). Nesimi was also editor of an Albanian language program at MTV but had to relinquish that position after the 1998 elections when the DPA appointed their own supporter.

Important changes have been made in how the party leadership is chosen. The new president is now able to appoint his deputies, secretary general and members of the presidential cabinet. Old PDP leaders fought these changes hard not only because it meant the end of their influence but also because it gave a great deal of unchecked power to the new president. Imeri quickly took control and appointed two vice presidents, a secretary general, and seventeen new members of the presidential cabinet. Only one member of the old PDP leadership remains: Vahit Sahiti from Likovo.

In the past few months, the party rhetoric has become increasingly hostile and critical of DPA's participation in government. Some of the more radical DPA members are rumoured to be ready either to switch over to the new PDP or establish a new party. These more radical politicians believe that Xhaferi has become too soft since his party joined the government, and DPA has had to go on the offensive to defend Xhaferi's radical past. In an interview with *KLAN*<sup>15</sup> newspaper in Tirana, Menduh Thaci found it necessary to remind Albanians that "Xhaferi is a well known person for all Albanians. He became a political prisoner at the age of 20 for his participation in the Tetovo protests of 1968 [protests for flying the Albanian flag]. He was forced to be out of Macedonia because of the lack of prospects and ethnic discrimination."

Xhaferi fled to Pristina and for a period worked as a reporter at TV Pristina. He returned to Macedonia in 1994 and quickly rose through the ranks of PDP. As mentioned earlier, he was forced out of the party and formed PDPA along with Thaci. Xhaferi really did not capture the attention of the ethnic Albanian voters until his stunning victory in the 1996 local elections. From 1994-98, he was an elected member of parliament but refused to attend parliamentary sessions as a protest against the government's poor treatment of its minorities. The SDSM government forced a recall and held a special election but a wide majority easily re-elected Xhaferi.

Since joining the ruling coalition, Xhaferi the radical has become Xhaferi the peacemaker, which is precisely why he is losing support in the ethnic Albanian communities. In a recent interview, he stated, "Albanians have made an agreement with Macedonia and do not want to destroy it. Democracy of

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<sup>15</sup> *KLAN*, 18 April 2000, p. 1.

consensus is a guarantee of stability and peace in Macedonia and in general."<sup>16</sup> Despite this apparent political transformation, nearly every ethnic Macedonian in the country mistrusts Xhaferi. For them, it is not enough to hear about his commitment to democracy and consensus building. They need to hear Xhaferi state clearly and unequivocally that ethnic Albanians in Macedonia have no desire to become part of a greater Albanian Kosovo. Until these words are publicly spoken, suspicions will remain.

The close ties between Xhaferi and Hashim Thaci, chairman of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, alarm many Macedonians. Xhaferi's frequent trips to Pristina to meet with Hashim Thaci are viewed in Macedonia as a harbinger of Xhaferi's ultimate territorial aspirations for western Macedonia. In contrast, Western diplomats in Skopje<sup>17</sup> view Xhaferi's role as a positive one, citing his political experience as a key partner in the current multi-ethnic government coalition. Xhaferi, for all practical purposes, is the most senior ethnic Albanian leader in the region since Sali Berisha has been sidelined in Albania. Xhaferi knows the players in Kosovo well from his radical student days in Pristina and appears able to exert some influence on Thaci and others. In fact, Xhaferi is often called upon to deliver unofficial messages and warnings from the international community. Xhaferi, if he so chooses, can play a moderating role among the Kosovars and he seems to be doing so.

Xhaferi's increasingly moderate stance in Macedonia and in Kosovo, has contributed to the rise of several small nationalist parties. Skopje-based Albanian intellectuals who contend that Albanian political power is too greatly concentrated in Tetovo and Gostivar have founded two new political parties this year. The Democratic Alliance of Albanians (DAA), founded by Mevaip Ramadani, is based on the principles of "fighting for the rights of Albanians in Macedonia." At the 5 June party central board meeting, Ramadani charged that DPA did not "accomplish any of its promises, like the changes in the constitution and in other laws that do not fulfil the rights of the minorities."<sup>18</sup> Aslan Selmani, current PDP Member of Parliament and former Minister of Science, has been appointed as president. The party claims to have about 20,000 members mostly from Skopje and Kumanovo. The Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA) has no nationally known figure among its top leadership. DUA is seen as an empty party created by Vasil Tupurkovski, President of the Democratic Alternative, in an attempt to challenge the DPA and PDP lock on ethnic Albanian votes. The general belief among ethnic Albanians is that this is not the moment to challenge the two main political parties. The formation of these two new parties has, however, reinforced PDP's new leanings towards the more radical left.

Rufi Osmani and Alajdin Demiri may present a greater challenge to Xhaferi's leadership than any of the new emerging ethnic Albanian leaders. The former

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<sup>16</sup> *Fakti*, 10 April 2000, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> ICG Interviews in Skopje, 3-7 July, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> *Večer*, 22 May 2000, p. 3.

mayors of Gostivar and Tetovo became symbols of Albanian nationalism when they and other local officials were arrested in 1997 for ordering the Albanian flag to be flown from public buildings during public holidays. Osmani was sentenced to thirteen years and eight months in jail for "fanning racial, national and religious intolerance,... inciting rebellion,... and disregarding [decisions of] the Constitutional Court."<sup>19</sup> Gostivar City Council President Refik Dauti received a three-year sentence on the last charge. Tetovo Mayor Alajdin Demiri and Tetovo City Council President Vehbi Bexheti were convicted on similar charges and each sentenced to two years and six months in prison.

After the new coalition came to power in late 1998, the Macedonian parliament on 29 December 1998 passed an amnesty act with the main aim of releasing the ethnic Albanian politicians.<sup>20</sup> Some 75 deputies voted in favour of the bill but it also sparked fierce criticism because in order to release Osmani, Demiri and the others, the sentences of almost 1,000 persons charged with "disturbing the peace and order" were also commuted. Although a list of the released prisoners was never made public, it is assumed that most of the prisoners were ethnic Albanians who had been charged with illegal possession of firearms and narcotics.<sup>21</sup> President Kiro Gligorov at first refused to sign the bill, and then formally vetoed it on 22 January 1999. This was the first time since becoming president in 1991 that Gligorov used his veto to block legislation. On 4 February, the parliament overrode Gligorov's veto, and the law thus entered into force. Osmani and Demiri were released from prison the following day.

Since their release from jail, Demiri has been banned from DPA and is licking his wounds in Pristina. Osmani continues to challenge Xhaferi and is gaining in popularity amongst ethnic Albanians who believe Xhaferi has betrayed their cause. Osmani presents a real threat to Xhaferi because below the level of Xhaferi and Thaci, the DPA leadership is rather thin. Osmani is likely to join PDP or form a new party when he decides to stage his comeback. Thaci is generally dismissed as a possible successor to Xhaferi because of his alleged close links to the Albanian underworld. Thaci has recently charged two former officials from the Macedonian Ministry of Interior, Pavle Trajanov and Alexo Donevski, with threatening to assassinate him. The threats are more likely, according to other sources,<sup>22</sup> related to Thaci's rumoured conflicts with the Albanian mafia over profits from alcohol, cigarettes and drug smuggling.

Opinion is equally divided in the Albanian community as to whether Arben Xhaferi's apparently deteriorating health is a cause for concern or an elaborate ruse to keep his competitors at bay. When asked recently about his health, he replied, "my health situation is quite difficult. I have health problems, but I

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<sup>19</sup> *Dnevnik*, 18 September 1997.

<sup>20</sup> MILS News, 30 December 1998.

<sup>21</sup> *Dnevnik*, 30 December 1998.

<sup>22</sup> *Dnevnik*, 9 June 2000, p.1 and June Report of the British Helsinki Commission.

wisely know enough to make this bad health a part of my personality and to live with it."<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Albanian Language Media

One of the key demands of the ethnic Albanian political parties is that the number of program hours in Albanian on national television and radio be proportionate to the population — hence they believe that they are entitled to more than one-third of broadcast time. The most influential television station in the country is Macedonian Television (MTV), which is heavily subsidized and regulated by the government. Many of the controversies surrounding Albanian-language programming are played out among the senior managers of MTV. In May, Vice Director of MTV Imer Ismaili resigned from his position because of his "displeasure with the anti-Albanian politics of the station."<sup>24</sup>

There are two main Albanian language newspapers, *Fakti* and *Flaka e Vellazerimit*. *Fakti* was launched in April 1998 to counter what its editor Ilir Ajdini called an "unbalanced" view of the news. In general *Fakti* leans toward the DPA position, often supporting the more moderate or Xhaferi's positions. *Flaka*, on the other hand, tends to be more sensational and often gives more favourable coverage to the Thaci supporters within DPA. *Fakti* maintains its hard-won reputation as an independent newspaper but increasingly at its own financial peril. Through its previously close ties to DPA, *Fakti* receives some financial support from the ethnic Albanian parties but only enough to pay its workers and not enough to turn a profit.

One of the unintended consequences of the Kosovo crisis has been the flight of qualified ethnic Albanians from low-paying jobs as journalists to international organisations. The quality of reporting in Albanian language media has deteriorated considerably in the past year. Many of the best journalists are now employed as translators because they earn up to five times their previous salaries.

## 3. Public Sector Employment

One thing which should be less difficult to achieve than constitutional and legal changes is to increase the proportion of ethnic Albanians in the state administration - not just local administration, but also at the central level. In most ministries, there are a handful of ethnic Albanians at best, and their percentage of the total number of staff is in single digits.

The Parliamentary Commission on International Relations released a report in May that detailed the breakdown of the ethnic workforces.<sup>25</sup> In Macedonia, the

<sup>23</sup> *Forum*, Issue 53, 11-24 February 2000, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Flaka e Vellazerimit*, 5 May 2000, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> *Dnevnik*, 22 May 2000, p.1.

work force is 84.5 per cent ethnic Macedonian and 9.4 per cent ethnic Albanian, while the potential ethnic Albanian work force is 18.5 per cent of the total population. The ethnic Albanians work mostly in agriculture and civil engineering. The statistics for public sector employment are similar. In the police force and the military, ethnic Albanians contribute 3.1 per cent of the employees while the ethnic Macedonians make-up 93.9 per cent. There are some recent improvements - the new police chief of Tetovo, the largest city with an ethnic Albanian majority, is now ethnic Albanian - but on the whole, ethnic Albanians continue to be extremely underrepresented on all levels of the state administration.

There are at least two problems, however, connected with increasing the number of ethnic Albanians in the administration. First, the education level among ethnic Albanians is lower than among ethnic Macedonians. The share of university graduates in particular is considerably lower. Second, Macedonia's public administration needs to be streamlined. If anything, it is overstaffed and inefficient. This means that increasing the number of people employed by the state — the most obvious way of getting ethnic Albanians into the administration — is probably the wrong approach. It would also run counter to everything that Macedonia needs to do in terms of public administration reform to draw closer to Europe. If an attempt were made to reconcile those two aims by making additional employees redundant in order to employ ethnic Albanians, there would be fierce reactions by ethnic Macedonians. This would probably be even worse for inter-ethnic relations than not increasing the number of ethnic Albanians as much and as quickly as they want.

#### **4. Albanian Language Education**

Culture and education have long been key areas of struggle for the ethnic Albanians of Macedonia. The near total absence of higher education in the Albanian language in the country has dominated the ethnic Albanian national struggle over the past decade. Ethnic Albanian leaders see education as one of the keys to improving their community's status. Consequently, education issues have been high on the ethnic Albanian political agenda for years, and one of the main conflicts between the ethnic Albanian community and the government has centred on this issue.

In 1994, ethnic Albanians established their own university, dissatisfied by the government's unwillingness to introduce Albanian language instruction at the state universities in Skopje and Bitola. This new university is located in Mala Recica near Tetovo and is generally known as "Tetovo University." All ethnic Albanian parties, including the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) that was then in the government, supported its establishment.

Not surprisingly, the government declared that the university was illegal under the current provisions of the Macedonian constitution. But despite all its efforts,

the government has been unable to prevent Tetovo University from functioning, and has finally chosen to largely ignore it. By 1999 student numbers had reached 4,500 and the range of disciplines taught, with funding from the Albanian Diaspora, increased to include physical education, computer studies and pharmacology. Without external recognition, however, the students' final qualifications are to a large extent devalued and the long-term future of the university remains in doubt.

Parliament recently passed the contentious law on higher education on 25 July 2000. The final vote was 61 in favour and 20 against, and followed days of acrimonious debate. More than 100 amendments were proposed and ultimately rejected. The legislation was drafted by a group of ethnically and professionally diverse consultants (including ethnic Albanians who currently teach at Tetovo University) within the Ministry of Education. The group seems quite aware of the daunting challenges but was determined to find a "Macedonian" rather than foreign solution to the problem of higher education. According to Minister of Education Gale Galev, "the law reflects the European orientation of Macedonia, the needs of the minorities and it is compatible with the constitution and international law."<sup>26</sup>

The law is based on a proposal by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel. It proposes that a new private university replace Tetovo University. This university would be open for all nationalities, and the working languages would be Albanian and one or two foreign languages, most likely English and German. Additionally, the curriculum would include mandatory studies in the Macedonian language. Van der Stoel's proposal has several advantages. For one, it would establish an Albanian language university and satisfies one of the key demands of the ethnic Albanian community. Secondly, the government saves face by not recognising Tetovo University in its current form.

Another advantage of establishing the new university is that it offers an opportunity to sideline some of the more radical elements at the Tetovo University. Several of its staff, including the dean, Fadil Sulejmani, have in essence politicised the issue of Tetovo University to such a degree that the original cause, i.e. providing Albanian language university instruction, has been pushed into the background. For some Tetovo University has been a political tool to push nationalist demands, rather than a concrete policy issue.

Under the law, the new university will not be incorporated as the third state-funded university (after Skopje and Bitola) but it may be registered as an official body of higher education although without financial support. According to Tito Belichanec, chief technical expert of the drafting committee, the new law distinguishes between support of private institutions and financing of them. Belichanec said that the state could finance programs or projects through private

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<sup>26</sup> *Utrinski Vesnik* and *Dnevnik*, 13 June 2000, p. 1.



universities but the law does not make provisions for private universities to become state-funded.

The benefits of the new law, however, are matched – and may be more than matched - by its defects. It seems wishful thinking to hope that the highly politicised ethnic Albanian community will simply ignore the fact that Tetovo University has existed for five years regardless of its legal status. Even the more moderate wing of the ethnic Albanian activists will find it extremely difficult to stand by while the government closes Tetovo University in order to open a more sanitized university located away from the centre of Albanian-dominated intellectual life and politics. On 18 July 2000 more than 1,000 PDP-led protesters marched in central Skopje to voice their rejection of the law and to demand legal recognition of the University of Tetovo.

Another problem with the proposal is its implicit assumption that the only professionals who need to be educated in the Albanian language are future teachers for primary and secondary schools and future public administration employees. A further constraint – though not likely to be a major problem in practice - is that the Van der Stoel proposal assumes that foreign donors will generously finance the new university until some point in the future when the Macedonian government accepts this financial burden. (He suggests that after four years the state could partly finance the private university.)

In order to reach a lasting settlement of this issue, both sides will have to compromise. The ethnic Albanian side will have to accept that a new university will not formally be a direct successor to the Tetovo University. Ethnic Macedonians for their part will have to live with the fact that there will be a legal institution of higher learning where the main language is Albanian. It is imperative that the international community lends its support for the quick establishment and construction of the new university. All decisions related to curriculum development and faculty hiring must be conducted in an open and transparent manner.

## **E. Federalisation or Decentralisation**

Macedonia remains quite centralised as a state. Local administration in the country's 124 municipalities is ill equipped and lacks all kinds of resources, above all sufficient funding. Mayors and municipal councils are not in a position to effectively address their municipalities' problems due to a lack of funding and power. The position of the central government and state administration in Skopje continues to be very strong and wields a major say in appointments at the local level. As is the case in many countries in the Balkans, party affiliation in Macedonia is a major criterion in filling positions in the public administration and state-controlled enterprises.

Skopje, the capital, is largely seen as an anonymous apparatus, which is mainly interested in maintaining power and catering to the needs of its supporters, ethnic Macedonians in particular. This situation — along with ethnic Albanian demands for a stronger role and higher status in the country — has led to repeated discussions among the ethnic Albanian community about whether the state should be structured along more federal lines. Macedonian parties have invariably rejected such ideas, saying this would be a first step towards autonomy and the eventual partition of Macedonia.

Federation indeed poses a number of serious risks. More radical ethnic Albanian politicians demand that western Macedonia gain a certain degree of autonomy, and some of them have yet to clearly state that they see their community's future within a democratic Macedonian state. There are fears among ethnic Macedonians that many ethnic Albanian leaders are only paying lip service to the idea of a Macedonian state in its present form and that the creation of a Greater Albania — or Greater Kosovo — is their ultimate goal. Ethnic Albanian leaders reject such allegations, but many people do not trust their sincerity. Therefore, calls for more regional autonomy or even a federalisation of Macedonia meet with firm resistance outside the ethnic Albanian camp.

Even if federalisation does not necessarily have to lead to a break-up of Macedonia, it could result in a de facto separation of the country into two units. Interaction between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians is fairly limited anyway, and any kind of federal arrangement is likely to strengthen this tendency. On a more optimistic point, giving the ethnic Albanian community more authority to manage its own affairs could lead to a stronger attachment to a redefined Macedonian state. On balance, however, there is a strong risk that federalisation could destabilise Macedonia and as a consequence the region as a whole.

A possible answer to this problem could be further decentralisation of the state structures. A Ministry of Local Self-Government was formed after the 1998 parliamentary elections but has yet to make any real impact. In order to strengthen the municipalities vis-à-vis the central government, relations between the two levels must be redefined. Municipal governments must be given more power. They should be able to run local affairs reasonably autonomously as long as their decisions and actions are in line with national legislation. Local authorities should deal with those issues best addressed at a local level.

Municipalities need to be given more financial resources and more freedom to use them for their needs. Revenues from certain state collected taxes could be given to the municipal authorities, or the municipalities could be given the power to raise certain taxes themselves. In the medium term, increased fiscal autonomy might also lead to more responsibility at the local level, although it is difficult to imagine that red tape, corruption, and favouritism would disappear overnight.

The most pressing issue is that there are far too many municipalities in the country. If the number of 34 municipalities under the old administrative division was too low, then the current number of 124 units is much too high. The average population of a municipality is just over 16,000 but many municipalities are considerably smaller. Such units cannot function effectively, and a high number of municipalities inevitably lead to a bloated apparatus if the staff of all units is combined. If decentralisation is pursued seriously, then the number of municipalities should be reduced to between 70 and 80.<sup>27</sup> This would reduce expenditures, give individual municipalities more weight, and make co-ordination of many public works easier. If the new municipal centre is further away, branch offices could be kept in the old municipal centres.

The government has proposed a number of changes affecting the local government, including restrictions related to self-financing. The amended "Law for Financing of Municipalities," the "Self-Government Law," and a new law on "Territorial Division" were proposed for government review by the end of this parliamentary session. All related legislation, however, has been shelved until after local elections scheduled for 10 September 2000.

### **III. HOW DEVELOPMENTS IN KOSOVO AFFECT MACEDONIA**

The future of inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia is directly influenced by events in Albania and Kosovo. Arguably, Kosovo has more influence on ethnic Albanians in Macedonia than in Albania. Macedonia and Kosovo were part of the same state until 1991. Until 1912, both Macedonia and Kosovo belonged to the Ottoman Empire, from 1912 until 1918 they were part of Serbia, and from 1918 until 1991 both were part of Yugoslavia.<sup>28</sup> Ties between the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo became especially strong after an Albanian-language university was established in Pristina, to which many ethnic Albanians from Macedonia went. Due to increased mobility, family ties and close relationships developed between many ethnic Albanians from the various parts of Yugoslavia. Ethnic Albanian political leaders from Macedonia such as DPA Chairman Arben Xhaferi spent many years in Pristina.

Macedonia's ethnic Albanians displayed a great degree of solidarity towards their brethren from Kosovo during the recent crisis. Since the Macedonian government dragged its feet before finally deciding to set up refugee camps, ethnic Albanian families throughout Macedonia accommodated most of them. Macedonia's ethnic Albanians were highly supportive of NATO military action

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<sup>27</sup> Based on ICG interviews with mayors and city council members in Struga, Stip and Skopje, 3-7 July 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Excluding the period 1915–1918 when Macedonia was under Bulgarian occupation. From 1941–1944, the bigger part of Macedonia was again occupied by Bulgaria, while the Albanian-populated areas of Macedonia and Kosovo were part of Albania, then under Italian occupation.

against Yugoslavia, and they support Kosovo independence. An estimated 14,000 Kosovo Albanians remain in Macedonia.

There can be no doubt that Kosovo's future will affect Macedonia. The question is whether self-rule or independence for Kosovo will destabilise Macedonia. If Kosovo becomes independent or even only quasi-independent, there is a risk that more radical ethnic Albanian politicians in Macedonia will demand fresh negotiations on their own status. It is conceivable that they will press for political or territorial autonomy for those parts of Macedonia predominantly inhabited by ethnic Albanians. In the worst case, Macedonia's future as a state could be put into question if such demands are complemented by the establishment of parallel structures or by a boycott of state institutions.

Potential problems in Macedonia could be aggravated by the fact that ever since Albania sank into chaos in 1997, large numbers of weapons have found their way into citizens' hands. This is certainly the case in Albania and in Kosovo, and it is quite likely that some of them ended up in Macedonia. A further problem is the unchecked criminality in the region. The Macedonia-Yugoslavia border is rife with smugglers and radicalised elements of the former Kosovo and Serbian military units. The increased smuggling and corruption will present tremendous obstacles to stabilising domestic politics.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Macedonia's delicate ethnic balance has withstood the external pressures of the Kosovo crisis quite well in the past year. It is time, however, for its political leadership to move beyond the status quo arrangement and begin serious negotiations for permanent co-habitation. Recent skirmishes on the Yugoslav border are a reminder of Macedonia's fragility and the need to rely upon international guarantees for security. The increased presence of troops from NATO reduces the risk of a widespread outbreak of hostilities, but the risk is still real.

It needs to be made clear to ethnic Albanian politicians in Macedonia that while some of their demands for greater recognition and civil rights are justified, the ethnic Macedonians are not about to give away the very character of their country. They have nowhere else to go. They will hold on dearly to their language, their culture, and their religion because these are the things that make Macedonians feel Macedonian.

The ethnic Albanians need to put all their demands on the table and begin negotiations in earnest. They need to say the magic words clearly and loudly that "we live in Macedonia and we have no desire to live in or be part of a Greater Albania." In turn, the ethnic Macedonian politicians must accept that many demands of the country's ethnic Albanian community are justified and

should be met. They need to understand that improved inter-ethnic relations are in their own interest and will serve to stabilise Macedonia.

The situation in Macedonia is very different from the one in Kosovo between 1989 and 1999, and violence is not an option in resolving existing problems. The ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and elsewhere must understand that there will be no support from the international community for any kind of scenario envisaging a division of Macedonia and a possible merger of western Macedonia with Kosovo. International coaxing and financial support are critical if a historical compromise is to be achieved.

### **Political**

Macedonia's stability is crucial to the region and the international community. Its disintegration would tempt neighbours to assert historical claims on Macedonian territory and threaten to lead to conflict. The most important policy issue is to prevent it from becoming a multi-ethnic failure, with all the consequences that this would entail. To provide a foundation for Macedonia's continued stability, any resolution of Kosovo's final status should be made contingent upon provisions for ensuring Macedonia's territorial integrity and the Kosovo Albanians' explicit acknowledgement that they make no effort to include Macedonia's Albanians in a broader ethnic Albanian national state.

The European Union should take the lead role for the international community in drawing Macedonia into both European and transatlantic political, security and economic institutions. The integration of ethnic Albanians into Macedonian society would gain impetus if they and the ethnic Macedonians perceived themselves as part of a common European institutional and cultural identity. The EU should appoint a high-level resident advisor for European integration to encourage the political and economic changes that are needed, both to facilitate ethnic integration and Macedonian stability and to lay the groundwork for European integration. The EU should also encourage other international organisations to engage in efforts to invest in technical assistance and human resources training.

To further the process of political change and ethnic integration, the EU should encourage Macedonia's governing coalition to begin serious negotiations for a political settlement among the ethnic Macedonians and the country's minority inhabitants. This initiative would be based on the recognition that the piece meal approach has not been successful.

A political settlement will almost certainly require amending the citizenship law and the Macedonian Constitution. The EU should provide the political stimulus and any needed technical assistance for the extremely sensitive task of amending the most problematic components of the constitution, beginning with the preamble. The preamble should be rewritten to grant equal status to all the

peoples within the country and Article 19 should be amended to avoid special recognition to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. There is unlikely to be a more propitious time to begin the process. In the absence of international encouragement, it is unlikely that the current parliament will adopt any amendments.

Public confidence in the government administration and public sector must be restored in Macedonia. The level of political rhetoric and ethnic typecasting has reached an intolerable level. The demonising of political figures only serves to undermine public confidence in the entire public administration. EU leaders should take every opportunity to remind politicians in the ethnic Albanian and Macedonian communities of the dangers of extreme political discourse in the current regional setting, and urge that the rhetoric be tamped down.

The creation of a political framework which encourages rather than discourages the inclusion of all ethnic groups would be a powerful incentive for political parties to become more than ethnic voting blocs. The political environment is fragmented and the coalition must constantly seek concessions from within its own party ranks. Electoral reform will be needed to break this impasse. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) should take a leading role in encouraging electoral reform that makes elected officials accountable to the entire electorate and not exclusively to their own communities.

In the context of a more active involvement in promoting Macedonian electoral reform, the OSCE should begin to focus on the political ramifications of the upcoming census to be conducted in April 2001. It should strive to work directly with the ethnic Albanian political leadership to avoid repeating the disputed outcomes of the 1991 and 1994 censuses. Concerted efforts should be made to recruit and train ethnic Albanian and other minority staff for the Macedonian Statistical Office in order to dispel charges that the census methodology and tabulation were manipulated in order to reduce actual number of minorities living in the country.

Many of the necessary reforms that would make local governments more viable and efficient have been postponed until after the local elections scheduled for 10 September 2000. The United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) and the EU, through its Phare programme, have been providing technical assistance in this area. Their continued support should be predicated on the government's resolve to press for decentralising and self-financing. The current number of municipal units should be reduced from 124 to about 80 units.

## **Security**

The United Nations Preventive Deployment (UNPREDEP) force of 1,200 troops stationed in Macedonia from 1992-1998 was an important confidence building

measure. It helped stabilise the difficult transition from the Yugoslav Republic to independent state and raised an effective international barrier against interference from Belgrade that could have led to ethnic conflict. The NATO troops that are presently deployed in Macedonia to provide logistics support for the Alliance-led KFOR mission in Kosovo send an important indirect signal of the Western commitment to stability in Macedonia. NATO should seek agreements with Skopje to maintain a NATO troop presence along Macedonia's borders with Kosovo and Serbia for an indefinite period.

### **Economic Assistance**

Since Macedonia is dependent on foreign aid, the international community potentially has great influence in Macedonia. The European Commission should take the leading role in organising and coordinating a multi-year international economic assistance package for Macedonia, with strong support from the United States and international financial institutions. The initiative should be targeted at reforms that are focused on advancing the ethnic integration agenda and thereby domestically stabilising the country. This would help ensure those Western countries and multilateral aid agencies follow through on the financial commitments already made.

European Union political leaders should also take all available opportunities to promote significant private investment in Macedonia. Greek, Slovenian, Turkish and to a lesser degree, Italian firms, have already begun moving actively to invest in Macedonian businesses, and this trend should be actively encouraged.

### **Education**

The international community should make funding of higher education contingent upon progress by the Macedonian government in finding an effective long-term solution to providing access to, and funding of, higher education for all of the country's minorities.

The international community should press the government for the early formation of the "expert panel" charged with building the new university in order for it to become operational for the 2001-2002 academic year. The decisions and recommendations made by the panel should be subject to public hearings. The Macedonian government must also come to political terms with current students and graduates of the University of Tetovo. One suggestion is for the government to offer graduates the opportunity to sit for exams in order to receive equivalency diplomas by the University of Skopje.

### **Media**

Because of the large salaries being offered to translators, the international community in large part is responsible for the sharp deterioration of quality

journalism in the country, in the Albanian language as well as in Macedonian. Western governments, international organisations and NGOs should provide financial assistance to private media outlets in order to offer staff remuneration that is financially competitive with those salaries.



**Ethnic Albanian Political Parties**

**Party for Democratic Prosperity - PDP**

(Partia per Prosperitet Demokratik - PPD)

Founded: April 1990

President: Imer Imeri

Vice presidents: Qemal Musliu and Shpetim Pollozhani

Secretary general: Mahi Nesimi

**Democratic Party of Albanians - DPA**

(Partia Demokratike Shqiptare - PDSH)

Founded: June 1997 from a merger of Party for Democratic Prosperity of Albanians - PDPA (Partia per Prosperitet Demokratik te Shqiptareve - PPDSH) and the People's Democratic Party – NDP (Partia Popullore Demokratike – PDP)

President: Arben Xhaferi

Vice presidents: Menduh Thaci, Iljaz Halimi, Adem Ademi, Fejzullah Shabani

Secretary general: Bedredin Ibraimi

**Liberal Party - Democratic Alliance of Albanians - LP-DAA**

(Partia Liberale - Lidhja Demokratike Shqiptare)

Founded: 1996

President: Dzemil Idrizi

**Republican Party for National Unity- PRUP**

(Partia Republikane per Unitetin Popullor)

Founded: 1995

President: Nevzat Halili

**Party for Democratic Party - Right Track – PAD-RV**

Founded: 1995

President Qenan Mazllami

**Democratic Union of Albanians - DUA**

Founded February 2000

(Bashkimi Demokratik Shqiptar)

President: Besnik Telai

**Democratic Alliance of Albanians – DAA**

Founded: March 2000

(Alianca Demokratike Shqiptare – ADSH)

President : Mevaip Ramadani